
**THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND TEACHING APPROACHES ON
INTEGRATING
MODERN GREEK HISTORY IN KINDERGARTEN FOR REFUGEE AWARENESS**

Marina Bantiou*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this theoretical paper is to investigate the potential impact of incorporating historical narratives drawn from Modern Greek History, particularly the Greek War of Independence and the Asia Minor Catastrophe, into the teaching program of Greek public kindergartens, as a means to teach young children about the complexities of refugeeism, to foster a deeper understanding of cultural differences and promote equality and the importance of empathy and inclusivity in the context of the contemporary refugee issue. Grounded in educational theories and pedagogical approaches, this paper, within the context of the Greek educational reality recognizing inherent limitation, aims to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework and to propose teaching approaches on the topic for qualitative enrichment of the teaching program and the critical approach of the thematic units.

* **Marina Bantiou**, Adjunct Lecturer of History Didactics & Oral History
Department of Early Childhood Education University of Thessaly,
mbantiou@hotmail.com

MuseumEdu 8 / Spring 2024, pp. 111-118

Copyright © 2024 by Museum Education and Research Laboratory, University of Thessaly. All rights of reproduction in any form reserved.

First, a brief overview of History in preschool education is made, highlighting its role in shaping children's understanding of social issues and its connection to intercultural education by discussing how historical narratives can serve as bridges between cultures. Then, didactic approaches are explored for understanding the refugee issue and introducing children to concepts such as equality, diversity and solidarity through the two aforementioned pivotal historical events. In conclusion, this paper contributes to the discourse on the integration of History in preschool education to understand the refugee issue and raise awareness.

Keywords: cultural differences, equality, intercultural education, historical narratives, diversity, solidarity, history in preschool education

Introduction

Refugeeism is a key contemporary issue, which can be approached by educational institutions, starting from preschool education structures with the aim of developing values and attitudes, such as acceptance, understanding of cultural differences and solidarity. Aspects of Modern Greek History can be a suitable field for approaching this topic, given the refugee historical experiences of Greece, with characteristic events, the Greek War of Independence and the Asia Minor Catastrophe, which can be related to the contemporary refugee crisis. The purpose of this theoretical paper is to investigate the potential impact of incorporating the aforementioned historical narratives into the teaching program of Greek public kindergartens, as a means to teach young children about the complexities of refugeeism, to foster a deeper understanding of cultural differences and promote equality and the importance of empathy and inclusivity in the context of the contemporary refugee issue. This paper is based on educational theories and pedagogical approaches with the aim of presenting a comprehensive theoretical framework and proposing teaching approaches, while highlighting the potential benefits but also the challenges associated with such an approach.

History and intercultural education in kindergarten

In the Greek kindergarten, based on the curriculum for early childhood education, the teaching of elements of history and culture is defined as a subsection in the thematic section Social Sciences of the thematic field Child, Self and Society. Objectives are the understanding of human action in time, the familiarization of children with the concept of time, the development of historical perception and the familiarization of children with habits, customs and traditions. In the thematic sub-section "Social and Economic life" among the expected results is the awareness of children, the development of a responsible attitude and action in support of people's rights and the understanding of important values for social life (ΦΕΚ 2023). It is argued that children from a very young age can be introduced to historical concepts on the condition that appropriate educational methods are applied, as their mental development is linked to individual characteristics emphasizing the significant influence of the surrounding sociocultural environment (Vygotsky 1934/2012). An important parameter is to take into account the time available for the development of children's knowledge and perceptual ability, along with the need to first develop a sense of time, a necessary process for the development of historical understanding (Σακκής & Τσιλιμένη 2007: 24, 35). It is argued that historical knowledge can contribute to the smooth integration and socialization of children of another nationality at school by providing opportunities to firstly cultivate understanding and respect for otherness and diversity in the context of multicultural education and secondly to eliminate prejudices and

cultural stereotypes (Σακκής & Τσιλιμένη 2007: 66-67). Engaging with history encourages critical thinking, breaking down preconceptions and equipping students with essential skills. History, in the preschool context, provides opportunities for teachers to impart democratic values, cultivate a pluralistic identity and prevent xenophobia and intolerance (Καραμανώλη 2019: 155). Also, Barton and Levstik (2004), questioning the traditional approaches, argue that the teaching of history should inspire students emotionally, thereby enhancing understanding of complex and diverse human experiences of the past, while contributing to the common good in the present and future by connecting historical events with modern challenges, cultivating an informed, empathetic and socially responsible citizen. The role of history as a valuable resource is emphasized, where by integrating intercultural education into teaching and learning, it will enable teachers to foster open-mindedness and democratic values among students (Boloan 2009). Also, the integration of intercultural education in the discipline of history, as a new tool, can be used by teachers to increase students' awareness of diversity and solidarity, using aspects of history as a resource to address issues such as xenophobia and racism (Boloan 2009). Traumatic memory issues, as refugeeism is considered, although often considered 'difficult' for kindergarten children and may be met with distrust and avoidance by educators, can be approached educationally based on modern theories, as it is argued that children can be included in memory and history studies (Φαρδή 2023: 358). Young children come already into contact with the refugee issue either through public history or their family's narratives, especially if it is a family with a refugee background e.g. Asia Minor refugees, or of the kindergarten environment (Φάρδη 2023: 359). Children can easily understand that both in historical times and in the present, people have been forced to leave their homeland in order to ensure their survival (Σακκής & Τσιλιμένη 2007: 66-67).

Teaching approaches on integrating Modern Greek History for refugee awareness

The Greek War of Independence (1821-1829) is an important historical event, which is first approached already by the kindergarten classes on the occasion of the annual celebration on March 25th and it could be an opportunity to raise children's awareness of refugees. Another case, which could be also used either primarily or in combination, is the approach of the Asia Minor Disaster, which offers a distinct context for enhancing empathy and understanding of refugee experiences. The main cognitive objectives set are for the children to understand the concept of refugee, to learn historical facts about refugees in Greece and to connect human needs with human rights. In the socio-emotional goals, key points are the development of skills of solidarity, cooperation, empathy and respect and cultivation of the active citizen. Among the psychomotor goals we can mention team spirit, visual expression and symbolic play. The prompt can vary, coming from the students themselves or prompted by the teacher. The brainstorming technique is considered necessary in

order to identify pre-existing knowledge and attitudes about the topic and to develop their interest for further engagement. After the first contact with the concept of refugee, it is suggested to follow a class discussion about the causes of refugee and the problems faced by refugee children and their families.

The Greek War of Independence, as a historical event that can be used to teach the refugee issue, can be approached cross-curricularly with the visual arts. The utilization of documentary sources can contribute multi-prismatically to the understanding of historical concepts, to the development of historical understanding and empathy, producing different interpretations (Καραμανώλη 2019). There are many works of art by Greek and foreign painters, who have represented refugees of the time, such as for example the Mercier's painting 'Mesolongite refugees' or the paintings of Tsokos, Hayez, Grossi and Cornieti, who depicted the refugees of Parga in the pre-revolutionary years in boats fleeing their area, and also Sir Charles Lock Eastlake's oil painting of the persecuted Greeks after the catastrophe of Chios in 1822. The aim of the approach to historical events is the development of historical understanding, the formulation of hypotheses indicating language skills and the ability of thought processes, the provoking of interest in the past and the strengthening of empathy (McLaughlin 1988). Initially by viewing the artworks, children can be asked to freely comment on them, refer to what they think might have happened and explain their point of view. Teachers can discover any pre-existing knowledge of the children and challenge them through guiding and supporting questions, such as why the depicted people are hiding, why they are escaping, what their feelings are. The active learning process is considered good practice, involving discovery method, dialogue and argumentation among children, utilization of observational resources and usage of historical artifacts in order to accomplish the teaching goals (McLaughlin 1988).

In the same context, another event of late Modern Greek history, which can be used to teach and sensitize children to the refugee issue, is the Asia Minor Catastrophe. Fardi (2023) argues, regarding the integration of the Asia Minor Catastrophe in historical education in kindergarten, the contribution to the preservation of cultural memory with an emphasis on differentiated and inclusive teaching in kindergarten through modern methodological approaches, presenting theoretical approaches and educational proposals. Focusing on the Asia Minor Disaster, the sources that approach the refugee issue may vary beyond photography and pictorial depictions, using additional contemporary material such as maps, documentaries, visits to historical and museum sites, if possible, even conducting oral history projects, where the children can listen to oral testimonies of refugees under conditions and with appropriate preparation based on the principles and methodology of oral history in education. The family environment, where there is relevant experience, may be involved, as children can [even through an Oral History project] get information from family members about the reasons for leaving their country and the cultural elements

of their old homeland (Σακκής & Τσιλιμένη 2007: 67). It is suggested the students to decide who they would like to invite to school to talk about their experiences, either a person who has experienced being a refugee or a person who works with refugees and organize the interview accordingly (Παπαγιάννη & Κασιάρου 2007: 30-37). Then in class they could discuss the reasons that make people leave their homeland, the war and its consequences and the experiences and the feelings of the refugees. In addition, to strengthen children's understanding of historical events, especially the Asia Minor Catastrophe and the refugee issue, key locations can be used, as 'active places of memory' in Thessaloniki and Athens, which were formed by Greek refugees in the last century (Φάρδη 2023: 360). Also, additional museum kits can be utilized, such as the one from the periodic anniversary exhibition of the Municipality of Thessaloniki for the 100th anniversary of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, which, through equal access, enables children to engage with material evidence through experiential and exploratory learning depending on the appropriate for their age (Δήμος Θεσσαλονίκης 2022). For the kindergarten, the stories of Grandma Erato are recommended, which are mainly related to the cuisine of Smyrna, while for the first elementary school classes, the students are working on a tale and copies of objects that the refugees took with them during the persecution (Δήμος Θεσσαλονίκης 2022). Even children's literature can contribute to approaching the subject, as a means for discussions, research and introspective reflection. For example, the children's book 'Meli and Melek' deals with the Asia Minor Catastrophe, through the narration of grandmother Meli, who describes her experiences, the difficulties and the pain of being a refugee, without, however, concealing messages of hatred towards the Turks, but projecting humanity and peace as the main messages (Μαυρίδου 2021). Another point of consideration can be the refugee residence, expanding children's acquaintance with aspects of the daily life and education of Asia Minor refugees, encouraging children to observe, describe and compare, cultivating historical consciousness through creative activities and explorations (Φάρδη 2023: 362-363).

The approach to the refugee issue through aspects of Greek history can be completed with the presentation of photos from today and a discussion about the needs of the refugees. It is suggested that students to compare the differences between yesterday and today in the refugee issue and take responsibility for their learning by presenting and proposing ways to manage and deal with this issue.

In the 5th kindergarten of Ierapetra, such an interesting approach was carried out for the refugees of the Greek War of Independence, the Asia Minor disaster and today. The children first examined paintings of the Greek revolution depicting refugees, discussed about the victims of the war, drew what they would take with them if they had to leave their home during the time of the Greek revolution and approached the concept of refugee (Παπουτσάκη 2016). Then, they observed and compared photographs of refugees from the 1922 Asia Minor disaster and photographs of contemporary refugees from 2016, leading to a discussion of the needs of these

people, where the children mentioned concepts such as hope, love, peace, dreams and material goods such as toys, clothes, books, food, etc (Παπουτσάκη 2016). In another educational project of local history implemented in a kindergarten in Thessaloniki regarding a school, which was founded to receive refugee children of the Asia Minor Disaster, it is reported that the children enjoyed the entire process, with an emphasis on the positive way of approaching the refugee issue and the processing of traumatic memory through pleasurable activities (Φαρδής 2020: 306-310).

Conclusions

History is an appropriate field for equipping preschool students with values and ideals necessary for the formation of an active citizen of a democratic society, providing multiple opportunities for use by educators (Καραμανώλη 2019: 155). History even in preschool education can promote a variety of strategies to cultivate attitudes and values against xenophobia and racism in today's generations, developing feelings of respect, solidarity and acceptance. Integrating refugee awareness into kindergarten history education aligns with broader educational goals related to social awareness, fostering empathy, understanding diversity, building historical consciousness, and critical thinking. The importance lies in forming positive attitudes and values and preventing prejudices. By exploring aspects of the refugee issue through Greek history, preschoolers can develop a positive attitude towards people from different backgrounds, cultivating a sense of common humanity and responsibility. By examining and processing different historical perspectives and their connection to the modern era, children are encouraged to understand the challenges faced by Greeks as refugees in different periods of history and refugees from other countries today. Important challenges and concerns that need to be highlighted are initially ensuring the appropriateness of the educational material that will be given to young children to process. Also, the successful connection of history with the refugee issue depends to a significant extent on the way the project is structured by the educators. This paper can be extended to the development of teaching scripts, educational resources and materials appropriate for young kindergarten children, such as interactive, experiential or playful activities, which emphasize the key aspects of the Greek war of independence and the Asia Minor disaster with a refugee focus.

References

- Barton, C. K., & Levstik, S. L. (2004). *Teaching history for the common good*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Bolovan, P. S. (2009). "Opportunities of the intercultural education in teaching-learning history", *Acta Didactica Napocensia*, 2 (1), 35-42.

- McLaughlin, K. L. (1988). "Approaches to the teaching of history in the early years: an assessment of developing historical awareness and skills in 6 and 7 year old children", *Early Years*, 8:2, 17-35. DOI: 10.1080/0957514880080203
- Vygotsky, L. (2012). Written: 1934. *Thought and Language* (A. Kozulin, E. Hanfmann, G. Vakar Trans. & Ed.). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Δήμος Θεσσαλονίκης, (2022). *Επετειακή έκθεση: 1922 - 2022: κύματα προσφυγιάς, κρίματα μνήμης: Μουσειοσκευή*. https://100hroniamikrasia.gr/?page_id=1458
- Καραμανώλη, Ε. (2019). "Οιονεί χαρτογράφηση εννοιολογικής προσέγγισης της ιστορίας στο νηπιαγωγείο", *Διάλογοι! Θεωρία και Πράξη στις Επιστήμες της Αγωγής και Εκπαίδευσης*, 5, 150-167, <http://dx.doi.org/10.12681/dial.20701>
- Μαυρίδου, Β. (2021). *Μέλη και Μελέκ*. Αθήνα: Διόπτρα.
- Παπαγιάννη, Β. & Κασιάρου, Ε. (2007). *Διαπολιτισμικό σχέδιο εργασίας 2: «Πρόσφυγες»*. Αθήνα: Εθνικό και Καποδιστριακό Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών.
- Παπουτσάκη, Κ. (2016). "Πρόσφυγες και 1821- Το Παρελθόν και το παρόν". <https://www.popi-it.gr/giortes/25-martiou/prosfigia/>
- Σακκής, Α. Δ., & Τσιλιμένη, Τ. (2007). *Ιστορικοί Τόποι και Περιβάλλον: Διδακτικές προσεγγίσεις για παιδιά προσχολικής και πρωτοσχολικής ηλικίας*. Αθήνα: Καστανιώτης.
- Φάρδη, Κ. (2020). "Ιστορία και τραύμα στην πρώιμη παιδική ηλικία: Εκπαιδευτικά προγράμματα ενσωμάτωσης παιδιών προσφύγων σε ελληνικό νηπιαγωγείο". Στο Τ. Πετρίδης & Μ. Φραγκουλάκη (επιμ.), *Η διδασκαλία της Ιστορίας και η δημόσια παιδαγωγική: Πρακτικά διημερίδας, 1-2 Νοεμβρίου 2019* (σσ. 299-318). Αθήνα: Όμιλος για την Ιστορική Εκπαίδευση στην Ελλάδα.
- Φάρδη, Κ. (2023). Η πολιτισμική μνήμη στο νηπιαγωγείο εκατό χρόνια μετά από τη Μικρασιατική Καταστροφή. Στο Χ. Τσιουρίδης et al. (επιμ.), *Πρακτικά Εργασιών 8ου Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου, για την Προώθηση της Εκπαιδευτικής Καινοτομίας: Λάρισα 14-16 Οκτωβρίου 2022* (σσ. 358-366). Λάρισα: ΕΕΠΕΚ.
- ΦΕΚ, 10.02.2023, αρ. φ. 687.